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Here are two kinds of work that, after Marx, we think we understand with regard to the production of value. The first is the work that a labourer is doing when no one is watching apart from other workers, as when being paid an hourly wage to build a stage-set, or manage a project, or deliver some outcome to meet a deadline. This is just work: labour-power, a variable and anonymous form of capital -- and, Marx tells us, because the activity itself is objectified by being sold, it is also the site of the worker's estrangement from his or her own activity. The second is the work that the finished art-object is doing when it is available for display: it might be up for sale, or honouring a commission, or viewable for the price of a ticket. This is no longer 'work' but 'a work': the commodity-form, circulating independently and defined precisely by its abstraction from the labour that went into it, and hence a second degree of alienation. But what might be made of works of art that collapse the two, in which the 'work' of art consists of the ordinarily hidden labour that goes into producing it? By this I mean something different from those cases in which artists pay others to labour demonstratively and so to objectify themselves, as in the work of Santiago Sierra and others characterised by Claire Bishop as 'delegated performance' (2009); and also different from artists undertaking non-artistic employment but describing their activity as art, as in the 'occupational realism' discussed by Julia Bryan-Wilson (2012). Instead, I mean works of art or performance that expose their own apparently peripheral structures of value and labour that support the art-event itself -- an exposure that, I will argue, shares something with the social structure of the theatre.

If a Marxist critique of productive labour is that it is abstracted and alienated, becoming 'estranged labour' rather than 'life activity' or 'productive life itself' (Marx 1992: 328), then what potential does the theatre provide as a place to reassess productive labour, given that the theatre is itself long associated with dynamics of abstraction, representation, and reproduction? It would seem that there are two primary ways in which the interrelation between theatre/performance and labour have been conceived, and which are playing themselves out in various configurations in contemporary art and theatre works. The first of these, based in 1960s art practices, draws upon the blunt materiality of 'task-based' activity in order to resist the artifice of theatre, mimesis or acting. In this model, the impurity of representation is allegedly displaced by performativity, the presence of the action itself. The second and more recent model draws parallels with ideas of immaterial or affective labour, exploring the ways in which the performance-event is symptomatic of wider changes in economic

production: artists, performance-based or otherwise, can no longer claim some vantage point outside of advanced capitalism, but, it might be argued, are its most exemplary labourers. A recent issue of The Drama Review on 'Precarity and Performance' (2012) is indicative of this later trend, with several articles referring to the figure of the artist as characteristic of a new class of worker, the 'precaritat', a critical perspective also summarised by Claire Bishop: 'the virtuosic contemporary artist has become the role model for the flexible, mobile, non-specialised labourer who can creatively adapt to multiple situations, and become his/her own brand' (Bishop 2012: 12).

The kinds of ideas I want to develop here refer to both of these models, but bring to them a positive affirmation of theatrical representation, acting, and spectatorship, as a very peculiar kind of activity, or even work, that might render inoperative the typical productive function of labour. My title acknowledges the extent to which my thinking has been influenced by Adrian Kear's article 'Troublesome Amateurs' (2005). In this article, Kear tracks the productively problematic legacy of the idea of mimesis, with reference primarily to Adorno as well as Lacoue-Labarthe, in which 'the theatre [...] "exemplifies general mimesis" by providing a means of imagining the world otherwise' (Kear 2005: 32, original emphasis; the phrase Kear quotes is from Lacoue-Labarthe). But my focus is somewhat different from Kear, who was concerned with the possibilities of amateur performance in which the potentiality of 'free time' might somehow be realised as a kind of awkward shudder or laughter that 'seems to hold out the promise of alterity' (Kear 2005: 45). In contrast to this focus on amateurism, I want to think about the staging of professionalism, when the work being shown is being undertaken by people who are paid to do precisely what they are doing in order to make the art-event possible; but, like Kear, I see the failures and fissures of mimesis to be productive ones. These productive failures will be evident in the contrast between the two examples I wish to consider here, both of which foreground the supporting labour of apparently peripheral workers, normally hidden, whose work makes the art-event possible. The first of these is taken from a gallery-based context, the 11 Rooms exhibition curated by Klaus Biesenbach and Hans Ulrich Obrist and shown as part of the 2011 Manchester International Festival. One of the rooms consisted entirely of the email correspondences from project managers and technical workers attempting to make possible an ultimately unrealised work of art. My second example will be the theatre performance Entitled by theatre company Quarantine, which reconfigures itself somewhat in each site that it happens, but always involves an opening monologue from the production manager, who narrates the process of setting up the various pieces of technology as if in anticipation of a performance that, in Entitled, never arrives.

In each case, I will argue that one potential reading would be to understand the visibility of the paid labour as puncturing the mimetic artifice of the art-event and calling attention to the 'real'

social and economic relations that surround it; such an understanding is at least implied by the curatorial statements around each event. For example, in 11 Rooms the foregrounding of supporting labour might be seen as interrupting and grounding the dematerialised value structures of the gallery, although I will argue that this interruption is nevertheless a contained one. Moreover, such an interruption of artifice is complicated, if not entirely foreclosed upon, by the explicit theatrical frame of the second example. That is to say, we might think of the activities of the production manager, because they take place on a stage, as constituting acting, even though they are ontologically indistinguishable from the same set of actions he and his colleagues might perform in the same space were an audience not present and were he not narrating. Because of the explicit theatrical frame, I will argue that the 'real' labour fails to appear, leaving us with what is in the end only more acting, more mimesis. However, rather than understanding this failure as counterproductive, I will suggest that this might in fact show us something real about labour -- that is, its artifice. The theatre, I will argue, might be a place where we can give up our desire for the real because it will never deliver it; what remains in its stead is pure speculation, emptied of the promise of a return.

Precarious labour and the 'work' of art

In each of its biennial programmes to date, the Manchester International Festival (MIF) has commissioned some form of encounter between the world of high-profile visual arts and the activity of theatre. In 2007 this was Il Tempo del Postino, co-curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Philippe Parreno, in which contemporary gallery-based artists were asked to create works for the proscenium stage of the Manchester Opera House; and in 2009 Marina Abramović placed durational and performance-based practices on permanent display (during opening hours) in the otherwise empty Whitworth Art Gallery under the banner Marina Abramović Presents. In 2011, 11 Rooms combined these approaches, as co-curators Klaus Biesenbach and Hans Ulrich Obrist commissioned eleven highly regarded artists, whose practice is primarily based in galleries, to make installations involving human bodies on display in eleven rooms of the Manchester Art Gallery. Some of these included re-performances of previous works, such as Joan Jonas's Mirror Check (1970) and Marina Abramović's Luminosity (1997); some involved quite straightforward displays of realistic acting in a set, as in the bed-bound actor who recited monologues in Simon Fujiwara's Playing the Martyr (2011); some involved choreographed, anonymous bodies as in Allora & Calzadilla's Revolving Door (2011); and some involved performers whose specific identity in 'real' life was crucial, as in Santiago Sierra's use of professional soldiers in Veterans of the wars of Northern Ireland, Afghanistan and Iraq facing the

corner (2011) or Tino Sehgal's use of school-age children for Ann Lee (2011). When gallery practices incorporate performance, it is notable that they tend to distance themselves from theatrical practices (and above all from acting); as Shannon Jackson has observed, recent commentators on relational art are only the latest in a long line of art theorists 'who place the theatrical on the opposite side of whatever lines in the sand they are drawing' (Jackson 2008: 18). 11 Rooms is introduced by the curators in this way:

From morning to afternoon, these rooms will house 'sculptures' like any other sculpture gallery, but this is a sculptural display with a difference. For when the last visitors leave and the gallery closes its doors for the evening, the sculptures will all walk out as well, because they too are alive. (Biesenbach and Obrist 2011)

Without wanting to make too much of what is no doubt intended as a playful analogy, there is nevertheless something revealing about this encouragement to imagine these human performers, exhibiting behaviour in front of an audience, as sculptures -- rather than, for example, actors.

Indeed, the piece in the exhibition on which I want to focus attention is one that proposed to do away altogether with the possibility of acting, and the taint of fakery that comes with it. This was an installation nominally 'by' John Baldessari, in which the organisers attempted to stage a previously unrealised concept by Baldessari, dating from 1970, that proposed the display of a real human corpse. Baldessari's original proposal began by describing it as '[p]ossibly an impossible project', and indeed, for various reasons, MIF was unable to do so -- though not for want of trying. Instead, the walls of the room in which this installation was meant to take place were covered with printouts selected from a year of correspondence, in which the bulk of activity was undertaken by relatively anonymous members of curatorial and technical staff attempting to negotiate legal restrictions on sourcing a cadaver for the purposes of art instead of science, as well as displaying a cadaver outside of a medical or scientific institution. The display begins with a list of the involved parties -- something like a cast list, that includes gallery directors, a mortuary manager, professors of law and bioethics, and the president of something called the 'Biological Resource Center of Illinois LLC'. The correspondence tracks a dramatic journey through optimism and desperation, as new potential sources for the cadaver are discovered only to lead to further complications. A typical reply reads:

This exhibit sounds fantastic. Unfortunately, for our institution to support the cadaveric needs, we require demonstration of patient benefit. For an art exhibition there isn't a direct tie to patient benefit. We will not be able to assist you with this endeavor. (Email from 9 June 2011, 11 Rooms installation)

Right to the very end, the central figure in this drama is Polyanna Clayton-Stamm, hired temporarily as 'consultant' producer for MIF. As the number of options diminish, she remains optimistic:

I am working on the assumption that Wednesday 29th of June will be our cut off point. [...] We both feel confident that constructing the room, with all its details, along with installing the necessary refrigeration unit/extractor fan can be achieved within seven days. Allowing the eighth, and final day, to take receipt and prepare (make up artist) the full cadaver. (Email from 2 June 2011, 11 Rooms installation)

The project manager -- flexible, task-based, always working -- exemplifies the post-Fordist or neoliberal worker, and the world of contemporary art production simultaneously critiques and parallels the rise of what Hardt and Negri have characterised as immaterial labour: 'the production of services result[ing] in no material and durable good' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 290). This repurposing of the Baldessari piece makes this dynamic very clear, in the way that it shows that what the 'work' of artwork normally looks like is not primarily undertaken by the artist -- Baldessari's rough sketch takes up only a couple of pages in the display -- but by hidden activities of communication, negotiation, and professional virtuosity. Viewed as a critique, this presentation makes apparent the way in which celebrated artists and curators derive surplus value from the (waged) labour of those working for them. Clayton-Stamm, as project manager for the Baldessari installation, is typical of the kind of invisible (and temporary) work that supports the art world. One of the functions of the display of correspondence, then, is to make her function visible -- perhaps analogous to those modes of institutional critique deployed by such artists as Mierle Laderman Ukeles in her 'maintenance art', in which the artist took on exaggerated, manual versions of the kinds of maintenance tasks normally hidden from view in the art gallery, such as scrubbing the gallery steps and floor by hand.¹ I think there is value in the way in which this dynamic is exposed; and yet, it also seems that such exposure is immediately re-appropriated by the valuing systems of the exhibition precisely through its exposure as art. In the terms of the distinction laid out at the beginning of this article, when the work becomes a work, its challenge to hierarchies of productivity and value becomes subsumed within the encompassing authority of what Jacques Rancière has called 'the aesthetic regime of art' (Rancière 2004: 22-34). Whereas Ukeles may have benefitted from this additional valuing system, gaining financial and reputational recognition as an artist, one might say that the presentation of the correspondence in 11 Rooms serves to extract surplus value from that same labour all over again. Indeed, the 'work' of art here is no longer that object or event that is made possible by anonymous labour, but is in its entirety that labour itself, being put to work twice, but paid only once.²

¹ A more careful analysis than I am able to offer here would distinguish between the kinds and degrees of instability and agency that tend to get lumped together under the concept of 'precarity': the situation of the contracted cleaner is quite different from that of the freelance project manager, as is that of the globe-trotting artist creating his/her own brand identity. For more nuanced considerations, see, for example, Jackson (2012) and Free Art Collective (2013).

² Indeed, something curious happens to the status of the 'material' of that labour. As I began research for this article, I (rather naively) asked a contact at MIF if I might have a copy of the project manager's emails for

Of course, artists and curators are very much aware that contemporary art is closely mirroring the development of advanced capitalism, and, for some, such a parallel allows an opportunity for critique. For example, curator and writer Nicolas Bourriaud, whose idea of 'relational aesthetics' was devised as a catch-all phrase for art's engagement with social systems rather than material objects, has more recently celebrated the idea of what he calls 'precarious art'. 'Today,' he writes, 'we need to reconsider culture (and ethics) on the basis of a positive idea of the transitory, instead of holding on to the opposition between the ephemeral and the durable' (Bourriaud 2009: 23). More cautiously, artist Liam Gillick -- a central figure in the debate around relational aesthetics -- acknowledges the potential problem of 'a series of practices that coincide quite neatly with the requirements of the neoliberal, predatory, continually mutating capitalism of the every moment' (Gillick 2011: 61). However, for Gillick, artistic practice continues to hold the potential of a critical position toward the forms it adopts, primarily when the artist identifies him or herself on the side of the observer of social relations, rather than as the visage that confronts us in a face-to-face encounter such as those staged by service economy employees; though we can't get outside the system, Gillick wants art to say, let's find a way from within to look at this system together.

Art is not a zone of autonomy. It does not create structures that are exceptional or perceivable outside their own context. [...] For example, with regard to the undifferentiated flexible knowledge-worker who operates in permanent anxiety in the midst of a muddling of work and leisure, art both points at this figure and operates alongside him or her as an experiential phantom. (Gillick 2011: 70)

In relation to the Baldessari emails, one could argue for a reading that the display offers the kind of critique that Gillick suggests, one that parallels structures of exploitation and value-extraction, but as a ghost or a phantom rather than the real thing.

But the success of the critique depends on the extent to which it wrestles with the idea of work, with what is meant by labour itself and the function it serves within the work. I would suggest that in the context of the 11 Rooms piece, labour is deployed as a signifier of the real -- that is, as 'real' human activity and industriousness that stands in for, and trades upon, the unavailability of the absent corpse. Indeed, what is the allure of the idea of a corpse? Baldessari's original proposal (see figure 1) suggests a 'double play' in which the corpse's representational status is as much a factor as its material reality; his notes and sketches show an engagement with rules of perspective, placing the body firmly

reference. I was told, regretfully, no, that these emails, presumably still existing in multiple digital copies on the computers of multiple recipients, now constitute the artwork! Although I was generously invited to review the physical copies of the emails, they obviously remain of value as intellectual property. 11 Rooms has continued to circulate as an expanding exhibition, as 12 Rooms (2012) for the Ruhr Triennale, and as 13 Rooms (2013) for the upcoming Kaldor Public Art Projects in Sydney (although the Baldessari contribution is to be replaced with a different piece for the latter of these).

within histories of representation of Christ, and its suggested use of a peephole might recall Duchamp's Étant donnés (1946-66) with its self-conscious reflection on voyeuristic spectatorship. Baldessari writes, 'The subject is not the cadaver. The subject is rather the issue of breaking and mending aesthetic distance' (Baldessari 2011). Nevertheless, the emails necessarily focus on the central question of the cadaver, and, in its very absence, what is evoked is a possibility of the limit of representation that the corpse represents, the ultimate in real performance -- as in 'you can't get more real than this', or 'there's no denying the reality of it', or 'we're not dealing with artistic representation any more'. Curator Biesenbach writes in one of the emails:

I am seriously worried that the point of John Baldessari's piece is the courageous displacement of something that has no other place in society, neither profane nor art spheres any more. If there is any way we could still achieve this that would make the exhibition truly unique and groundbreaking. (Email from 20 May 2011, 11 Rooms installation)

In this way, I would argue that the emails function to invoke the mundane reality of organisational work, its supposed fact-ness, circulating around the apparently impossible hope of realising the cadaver display, in a way that seems aligned with the idea that the function of art is to overcome its artificiality and deliver us into encounters with the real.

Stage-hands and the non-productivity of theatrical labour

In what follows, I want to extend this association to suggest that this desire to overcome representation -- which might also be described as performance's desire to overcome theatricality -- might be seen to parallel Marx's own dream of unalienated labour. 'Let us finally imagine, for a change,' Marx writes, in a reverie inspired by Robinson Crusoe, 'an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force' (Marx 1977: 171). Indeed, theatre itself seems to be tainted by being exemplary of the commodity-form, even in the way Marx borrows language from the theatre in order to describe the transformations and abstractions that characterise the fetishisation of the commodity: 'The complete metamorphosis of a commodity, in its simplest form, implies four dénouements and three dramatis personae' (Marx 1977: 206). A more spectacular image is conveyed by his famous description of the dancing table as metaphor for the twofold nature of the commodity:

The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will. (Marx 1977: 163-164)

As Nicholas Ridout (2010) has put it, 'There is something theatrical about the double life of the commodity', referring to the way that Marx describes the commodity as having two lives, one as something useful and one based on what it represents in terms of exchange value. The theatricality (or anti-theatricality) of Marx's theory of commodities is, of course, pursued at length across Derrida's Specters of Marx (2006), upon which Alice Rayner draws when she describes the 'specifically theatrical' image of the commodity-fetish: 'the blending of use and exchange values constitutes what it means to be on stage' (Rayner 2002: 541).

If the alienated world of the theatre is analogous, or even homologous, to alienated labour lived and sold as commodity, then the dream that haunts both systems is the idea of a backstage or offstage, where our bodies, and the objects we make, are not representations of themselves or part of a symbolic currency, but are simply themselves. Rayner addresses exactly this idea, describing the allure of the backstage, the stagehand, holding out the promise of something more real than what is onstage. However, and crucially, this apparent reality is no more than a stage-effect, a result of the division of spaces. Rayner writes,

Visiting the costume shop where clothes are being made, or seeing the prop storage where objects once seen on stage are in full view, and so obviously made of papier-mâché, holds its own kind of appeal that arises not because the objects and people backstage are actually more real than the objects and people on stage in performance, but because the spatial model of inside and outside creates a geometry of seeming difference. The spatial image not only incites the desire to see more, and to see the truth, but also reinforces the conviction that what is conventionally hidden and then revealed is more true and real than any representation. This sense of the real, which is felt as privilege, thus actually requires a hidden space, an invisible practice, where desire might find its object. (Rayner 2002: 538-9)

In this way, Rayner writes, what appears to be real is not something opposed to representation, but 'a differential function rather than object in or out of representation' (Rayner 2002: 547). The idea of the offstage, and by analogy a space and time where labour is itself and not alienated, is in effect a product of the stage itself; as such, I would suggest that the allure of unalienated labour may be one of capitalism's most dangerous seductions.

Rayner's hypothetical figures of the stagehands find a material manifestation in Quarantine's Entitled. As alluded to earlier, this performance consists essentially of the 'get-in' for a theatre show: the placement of the various pieces of equipment and scenery, the testing of sound levels, and the warming up and walking the space undertaken by performers before the show, usually done in the absence of an audience. As the audience enters, members of the production team are already engaged in these kinds of activities, such as sweeping the floor. This experience of entering while activity is in-progress is not an unfamiliar one in contemporary theatre, and, with the house lights on, members of the audience, at least the one of which I was a part, continue talking amongst themselves; the technicians, in plain view, are invisible -- or, better, visibly not-there. As Rayner writes, '[a]n audience, largely for its own benefit, agrees to ignore the presence of the technicians and to accept instead that only the visible or auditory results of their work will be counted as performance' (Rayner 2002: 537). But then the production manager, Greg Akehurst, introduces himself and his role and addresses the audience:

Before we start does anyone have any questions?

I'm Greg Akehurst, the production manager. Before we start there's a few things that I need to go through with you.

At the moment the space is like this because that's how we begin.

Soon we'll bring in some lighting and sound equipment and assemble large bits of scenery.

[Akehurst indicates the distance from the front row of seats with a measuring tape.] We'll never put anything closer to you than this. That's the legal distance.

This means you'll always have a clear route to the emergency exit.

The entrances here are the performers' entrances and this one leads to the dressing room.

The first thing that Chris and Lisa will do is bring in our sound system. It's a Nexo sound system.

They'll position the sub speaker here and the top speaker here.

During this performance it never has a sustained exposure of more than 100 decibels.

It will be loud but nothing to worry about. (Quarantine 2011a)

Akehurst, and the lighting and sound technicians, describe the details of the various pieces of technology -- their brand names, what they like about them, why they were chosen. They ask the performers to start checking the mic levels, and this allows the performers to start speaking

associatively, eventually building into more structured pieces of narration, while still ostensibly remaining within the conceit of the get-in.

One association that this performance has is with the kinds of task-based performances developed in the 1960s and 70s, that made a virtue of non-virtuosic action and what Michael Kirby (1972) described as ‘non-matrixed performance’. Rather than acting, one might be tempted to say, these performers are simply exhibiting behaviour. Indeed, whereas the convention of an audience entering while behaviour is already in-process may be characteristic of much non-illusionist theatre, Entitled takes this one step further, in that the behaviour being staged when we enter is the one kind of behaviour that can be proper to this place, that does not stand out as ‘restored’ or ‘matrixed’ behaviour; it’s perfectly natural to walk into a theatre and find people, dressed in black t-shirts configuring the space. (In fact, the other kind of behaviour that seems so natural as not to be worthy of attention is our own behaviour: to enter as a group, to sit, and to watch what is happening with disinterested interest.) So one way of reading this piece is as an attempt to minimise theatre’s artifice and maximise its reality. This is consistent with the reputation that Quarantine develops for itself. In the programme notes, director Richard Gregory writes,

Over the past 13 years, Quarantine has worked with all kinds of people, some of whom are rarely seen in theatres. [...] We’ve perhaps developed a reputation for working with ‘real people’ as opposed to actors on stage, portraying fictional characters. [...] For this piece, I wanted to explore some of the real stories of its performers -- somehow turning theatre inside out. (Quarantine 2011b)

And one of the things that the piece might be seen to insist upon, particularly in its second half, is the reality of what is happening and the authenticity of what is being shared; the performers share personal details apparently from their own life experiences, contributing to an atmosphere of confessional intimacy.

And yet, as invested as the company is in the use of ‘real’ performers and their stories, their intent is often to challenge distinctions between different kinds of work and their relative value. For example, in Susan and Darren (2008), the two title figures are Darren, who has trained extensively as a performer, and his mother, Susan, who has not. In her analysis of this work, Geraldine Harris argues that the appearance of authenticity that seems to characterise the work might be understood exactly as that, as appearance: ‘paradoxically, it is the focus on surface, “show” or appearances rather than what is “behind” them and indeed “behind” the show as a whole, socially, politically, personally or emotionally, that gives a sense of an “authentic” encounter with Susan and Darren “as one speaking subject with another”’ (Harris 2008: 14). Her article is accompanied by running commentary in the form of footnotes from Quarantine’s artistic directors, Richard Gregory and Renny O’Shea, and they

make a key intervention in the form of a challenge to Harris's use of the term 'non-professional' performers:

There is a problem of definition. 'Non-professional' or even 'amateur' often imply either unpaid or inept. Susan and Darren were neither. We pay all our performers (when we're allowed to: with EatEat's performers, this was illegal). 'Non-performer' is absurd, because they clearly are performers in the context they're encountered in (and if the argument is made that this isn't what they do most of the time, let me line up some thousands of self-defined 'actors' who haven't done any work paid or unpaid for donkey's years): 'untrained' is not specific enough, and what kind of training counts: RADA? BTEC? degree in theatre history? [...] Susan is there because nobody else could replace her. (Harris 2008: 9)

Any claim that there is something more 'real' or 'authentic' about 'these' kinds of people as opposed to others would have to be based upon an evaluative distinction between these different skills and experiences, between art and non-art -- and it is clear that Gregory and O'Shea pointedly refuse such a distinction.

For this reason, rather than proposing that the labour of the stage technicians lends authenticity to the piece's abstractions, I want to suggest that the frame of the theatre produces such labour as fabrication, as mimetic, as less concrete than it may appear. The theatre has the effect of flattening and equalising whatever behaviour is undertaken within its frame -- the dancer dancing, the singer singing, the storyteller telling stories, the production manager managing the production -- all of these appear as imitations, or at least as demonstrations: as people not just being people but acting like people. I am thinking here of Bert States' pronouncement, inspired by Peter Handke, that a chair on stage is a chair pretending to be a chair (States 1985: 20); we might think about this chair in relation to Marx's dancing table, where its pretence is a sign of alienation and abstraction. And to be sure, the 'pretending' of theatricality taints whatever appears on stage, no matter what it is, making it an appearance of a thing as much as it is a thing itself. As Rayner describes, when something is on stage, 'It is present, but also other'; 'something else is manifestly present but not necessarily identical to what is manifest' (Rayner 2002: 536).

But what I am interested in here is the way this abstraction produces a kind of non-productivity: no matter how much the stagehand sweeps the stage, he or she will not sweep the stage, but only show us sweeping the stage. Ridout describes this in-built capacity of the theatre for failure -- the way it never quite shows us the thing it promises to show -- as its constitutive feature: 'That there is something wrong with theatre is the sign that it is theatre' (Ridout 2006: 33). One way to think about this failure is not with reference to the logic of task-based performance -- a performativity that explicitly opposes itself to theatricality where 'performance presents; it does not re-present'

(Pontbriand 1982: 155) -- but instead with reference to the logic of the readymade. I'm particularly drawn to John Roberts' evocative description of the readymade as 'copying without copying': 'The object still retains its material and phenomenological form, but because it is no longer just an object of productive labour, it exists as other to itself, and therefore could be said to be a repetition of its original form' (Roberts 2007: 54). Roberts' description of the object that 'exists as other to itself' echoes both Marx's description of objectification, in which it is an undesirable feature, but also Rayner's description of that 'something else' that is 'manifestly present', even as it is not the same as what is manifest.

Something of the logic of the readymade is at work in Baldessari's proposal, with its appropriation of a corpse as art, as well as in MIF's strategy of re-presenting the product of curatorial labour as installation. However, the theatre event differs from the readymade in that the copying is not done through authorial nomination, but through spectatorial self-consciousness -- that is, through a set of affective rather than valuative social relations. Theatre may be the name by which some actions may be abstracted into surplus value: such as the way that people sitting around and talking with each other about their fictional lives becomes 'a work', and though some forms of theatre prefer to disavow it, theatre is always showing us people at work. But theatre is also a set of social relations that renders this apparently 'real' labour unproductive. I would argue that what these demonstrations of labour do not reveal is the backstage, the unalienated labour, the act of unmediated expression. Instead, what they show us is labour itself; but in showing it, it is rendered unproductive -- a contradiction, in that it is productivity that defines labour as labour. In showing us labour itself, then, what theatre shows us is that it is not there. The abstraction of capital is doubly abstracted by theatre, leaving us not with the real but with a copy of something for which there is no original, a copy made with no effort at all -- except for the apparently effortless activity of gathering together, as spectators, to watch.

Speculative work (in borrowed time)

After the show that never arrives, and following the actors' sound checks and walk-throughs that have drifted off into personal memories and anecdotes, Entitled ends with the technicians breaking down the set again. 'If you do the chairs and the costumes, Lisa,' Akehurst says, 'We'll do the floors. Then it's just the star cloth and the PA, and if we all get on the mark-up, then in 35 minutes I will stop.' As they finish these tasks, they play a game in which they imagine where they will be in a

few hours after the show, and then a few days, and onward through months and years until they imagine the time after their lives have finished. In the version I saw and the version recorded in the working script, if not in every performance, this speculation concludes with an image of one of their great-grandchildren clearing out the loft and finding a box of old photos.

And they'll spend an evening in front of the fire with the curtains shut looking through it

And they'll see me, stood here, on this stage

It's hard to think forward from there.

Is there anything left to do?

We'll finish it tomorrow. (Quarantine 2011a)

As Ridout and Schneider put it, the condition of precarity describes a structure of temporal indebtedness: 'Precarity is life lived in relation to a future that cannot be propped securely upon the past' (Ridout and Schneider 2012: 5). That is, speculative investment holds the present in thrall to possible futures, and as these imagined futures fluctuate, those in the present prosper or suffer. This is the inequity of speculation: the wagering of lives for profit, and an unequal distribution of risk and reward. Here, too, the structure of investment borrows from the theatre -- even in its very language of investiture: 'dressing up' capital in other garments in the hope that it might return, further bejewelled, from its adventures in faraway markets. As with Rayner's discussion of the structure of the back-stage, we might long for an end to this speculation, for an art or politics that would show us capital stripped bare, divested of its abstracted value.

But the structure of Entitled suggests a different kind of temporality, one in which the value of the investment is not in the future, or the offstage, but in the present: this temporary stage that is a copy of the 'real' one. The possibilities it holds out are not beyond this time and space, as the final lines reinforce through their dramatic return to now, but instead in the speculative space of the theatre-event, where we might dream not a different future but a different present. For its limited duration, we are all speculators -- or, to use a more familiar term, spectators. What is important here is not the backstage, but the space inside this room, the place where representations appear as themselves. And yet this space does not arise spontaneously, but takes work to hold it open. This, then is the value of the stage-hands' labour, and indeed that of the 11 Rooms project manager: not in its apparent realness, its potential rupture of the artificial space in which it appears, but in the holding open of the space of our own speculation.

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